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Bechtler Museum of Modern Art show celebrates Mid-Century Modern design

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Bechtler Museum of Modern Art

Mary Gilbert

Bechtler Museum of Modern Art in Charlotte, N.C., is currently presenting “*The House That Modernism Built*,” a major exhibition that curator Jennifer Sudul Edwards, Ph.D., calls “the intersection of modern [art](#) and modern design, and a celebration of the ubiquitous and the

commonplace.”

The show is curated from the



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museum’s own rich mid-20th-century art collection along with loans of furniture, textiles, and ceramics from such notable institutions as Eames Office, Herman Miller Archives, Alexander Girard Studios, and the Gregg Museum of Art & Design. More than 200 works are on view, including over 20 from the Bechtler collection that are available to the public for the first time.

The show, which runs until Sept. 11, emphasizes process. Other themes that flow through are industry, how design is function first, and the utopian ideal that thoughtful design improves the human condition.

"The House That Modernism Built" examines how designers and artists began with problems, or the need, how they addressed them, and how they solved the problems with solutions that would essentially change the world and benefit generations to come. To illustrate the creative process and critical approach to problem solving, the exhibition includes a variety of media – prototypes, design plans, manufactured pieces, prints, paintings, drawings, and sculptures.

Beginning with chaises like a swirled Thonet bentwood rocker and a stoically planked Stickley, the exhibition demonstrates that works could still have the feel of natural materials and the human hand, while also taking advantage of the resources of a factory to produce a high-quality product at an affordable price for the broader public.

Charles and Ray Eames' iconic plywood Lounge Chair Wood, abbreviated as the LCW, also was an outgrowth of a collaboration between design and industry. In 1942, the Eameses created a molded plywood leg splint for the military, which led them to design the LCW chair, and then they advanced to molding fiberglass. *Time Magazine* hailed the LCW chair as Best Design of the 20th Century. According to Herman Miller, the LCW chair has been in continuous production since 1946, and is more popular today than ever in terms of volume sold.

Another Eames design, the Eames Contract Storage Unit, or the ECS, brought modular living into the bedroom, with a folding bed, desk, and a closet. Charlotte's YMCA, built in 1960, was one of the first clients.

Existential sculptor Alberto Giacometti's representation of the human figure suffering from the effects of trauma and fear became a popular post-war symbol.

The exhibition pays tribute to designers who worked with textiles and color, among them Knoll and Josef Albers. Panels of boldly hued, repetitive patterns by Marimekko illustrate how the company worked to reconcile the natural, organic world with factory processes and new

chemical dyes.

Robert Probst's modular Action Office 2, represented with contents from its sales kit, changed the way people thought about the office. With its standing desk and file container on wheels, the design examined what the office does and where communication needs to happen between people, in addition to its role as a place to facilitate change.

Also featured in "*The House That Modernism Built*" are designs by Le Corbusier, George Nelson, Victor Vasarely, Harry Bertoia, Charlotte Perriand, and Mies van der Rohe.

Bechtler Museum of Modern Art concludes "*The House That Modernism Built*" with a nod to production in North Carolina. The exhibition showcases ceramics from the state and a geodesic dome developed as efficient, economical post-war housing by Buckminster Fuller during his teaching tenure at Black Mountain College in Asheville.

When you go

Bechtler Museum of Modern Art
At Levine Center for the Arts
420 S. Tryon Street
Charlotte, N.C. 28202
704-353-9200

bechtler.org

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Mary Gilbert

Charlotte Travel Examiner

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